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THE DEGENERATION OF TAMMANY.

BY THE HON. DORMAN B. EATON, EX-PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES CIVIL-SERVICE COMMISSION.

TAMMANY, the Tammany Society, Tammany Hall, the Tammany Democracy, the Tammany Machine—whichever may be used to designate the most unique and enigmatical product of a cross between simple charity and corrupt politics—has more and more, of late, aroused the curiosity of the country. Its origin is as peculiar and interesting as its present character.

In 1783, William Mooney, an eccentric upholsterer of the then little city of New York, formed a society for aiding and burying its poor members, naming it, in part after an Indian chief, the “Tammany Society, or Columbian Order”—some mysterious order of civilization. Thus from the outset the society had in itself the conflicting elements of savagery and charity which it has never lost. In 1805 it procured a special law for its organization, in which are these words, declaring its only purpose: “For the purpose of affording relief to the indigent and distressed members of the association . . . and others who may be found proper objects of their charity.”

From such an egg the huge crocodile of the municipal politics of our time has been hatched. The society was at first authorized to hold property of the yearly value of \$5,000—a right enlarged, in 1867, to \$50,000. No other change has ever been made in the charter. The Indian dominated in the official sphere from the outset, the chief officers being called Sachems, and the inferior being designated Wiskinski, Sagamore, or by equally barbaric names which yet survive. The civilized Christian prevailed in its little sphere of charity. Humbly, and innocently for a long time, the little society lived on. Politics had no place in its annals.

From a germ apparently so harmless there has been evolved the most mercenary and merciless despotism—the most extraordinary

combination of the spirit of the Indian and the spoilsman known to municipal government. The society in the course of years secured a hall, funds, and an influential membership. The politicians saw their chances. But the leading politicians of Madison's time were not of the kind now known as Tammany politicians. Besides, in the slow descent of this society from the heights of charity to the spoils-system bog of Tammany politics, it was for a time in the sphere of manly human nature, where statesmen and honest, patriotic methods were possible. At that period, when it was first subordinated to party, its name is associated with statesmen and it had a part in contests for principle. But the debasement, once begun, could not be arrested, especially after the spoils system had become potential in New York politics. The congeries of local organizations—known as the Tammany primaries—and the secret, central, and despotic body by which the society has become enveloped, have a long time since made its character unimportant, save in this vital particular, that its sachems, whom its members elect, constitute, in whole or in the majority, that despotic and irresponsible junto by which the Tammany Democracy is governed, and in obedience to which the Tammany Machine is operated. These sachems—this junto—at whose will the leaders of the twenty-four Democratic primaries in the city hold their places—are beyond the control of the primary membership, which is many thousands. Powerless democracy and potential despotism—like the Indian and the Christian at the outset—are now in the most vicious and unnatural union. The relation between them is that which Frederick the Great said existed between him and his subjects. “They,” he declared, “can say what they please, and I do what I please, and so we get on admirably.”

Nothing is now heard of the Tammany Society. Yet I was not correct in saying that a generation ago—save in the matter of making its sachems feudal lords over the Tammany Democracy—it became unimportant; for it owns a vast building, including a great hall, where the delegates of the Tammany primaries hold their meetings and say what they please. The strange contrasts, everywhere seen in Tammany matters, appear in the use of this hall, it being about equally shared by Tammany delegates and Tony Pastor's low-comedy company.

Among the lamentable consequences of the debasement of the

society from its once respectable to its present moribund condition are these—facts notorious in New York: that, for more than a generation, neither within the society nor in any one of the congeries of organizations by which its noblest life has been quenched, nor in all of them together, has there been produced, or brought forward, or steadily sustained even, one public officer, municipal or national, who could properly be designated a statesman, a patriot, or a public benefactor; nor have any of these bodies been the source or the strength of a single law, public measure, or policy, largely in the public interest, or which can justly find honorable mention in history; nor has one of them been prominent in aiding the repeal of any bad law or the suppression of any great evil. From none of these bodies or their leaders, so far as I am aware, has a single publication gone forth which can hold a respectable place in the literature of either politics or charity. The Tammany sphere, for a generation, has been one of intellectual and moral barrenness—of Lilliputs in usefulness, of Brobdingnags in rascality. Let no one cite that able, patriotic citizen, Abram S. Hewitt, or S. S. Cox, or Mayor Grace, to the contrary, for none of them sprung from Tammany, and each of them was opposed by it to the extent of its courage. That most active of politicians whom the official life of the Empire State has lately seen—and whom every reader will recognize—has been the only high officer since the days of Tweed and Barnard to whom Tammany has been constant.

It is this Tammany of to-day which, over the name of Mr. Richard Croker—sachem and champion—is introduced to the readers of this REVIEW in its last number. If in this article I found nothing I cared to answer separately, the relations of Tammany to the great problem of city government are so important I could not refuse a request for these pages.

Prudence would have suggested to Tammany the danger of bringing its affairs before the readers of this REVIEW—most of whom they have often disgusted—and the advantage of keeping its methods as dark and mysterious as that mongrel union has been between a charity society and a partisan faction for office and spoils. Yet, as Mr. Clarkson had come into these pages to defend the spoils-system methods which the Republicans had borrowed from Tammany, why should not the old offender himself be indulged in a like indiscretion? Coming here solely to

apologize for Tammany,—in the very midst of an elaborate defence, and while its chieftain is unconsciously betraying a painful sense of the distrust of his readers,—he declares, with a curious simplicity, that he will make neither apology nor defence for Tammany, since to rush on and to fight its opponents, and not to explain or defend anything, is its genius and its mission.

This defence has the assurance to boast of the great age of Tammany—an age most of the years of which only make conspicuous those prostitutions and debasements at which its degenerate sons might more fitly blush. Yet, much as sneers at mere theorists and at rural virtue invite retort, such self-stultification should not be too severely criticised; for rare are the genius and attainments which fit one for the Tammany arena and for these pages. Our author's no-apology theory has caused him to do grave injustice to Tammany itself, against which I feel a duty to defend it. For, referring to the charges against it, he declares that if, in the last election, it had "defended or apologized," the Tammany Democrats would not, to use his phrase, "have fared anything like so well." That this view—which places Tammany sachems and the horde behind them on a level with gamblers, thieves, and pirates, who never apologize and who certainly would be injured by any attempt at justification—is just to the lower strata of Tammany followers, I cannot deny. Yet it is a cruel wrong to many above them. There are vast numbers of Tammany's voters who are disinterested and patriotic. Not a few,—even of those who run with the machine, and whose war-whoops in Tammany Hall would drown the voices of Tony Pastor's clowns,—knowing no better, are as honest as their sachem-chief in thinking Tammany a blessing to New York. The frenzy and blindness of party keep great numbers in its ranks who deplore its vicious theories and its corruptions. There are many men of character who reluctantly adhere to Tammany—let it not be asked how many from hope of office and profitable contracts—because they think the city Republicans are corrupt. Not knowing so well as the Tammany chief what corruption is concealed, they think explanations less dangerous than secrecy.

Tammany leaders are sagacious enough to comprehend, in part, the power of the higher public press and public opinion. From a fear of them they put some good men in office, and

improved parks (Tweed did much of this) and streets, sometimes from better motives than the profits of spending vast sums.

Nevertheless, as a whole, the article is true to the Tammany spirit and theory, showing that organization, a crushing military discipline, adroit management of elections and voters, the tangible assurance of rewards, pecuniary and official, the love of contention and passion for victory—and not patriotism, nor principle, nor parties devoted to principle, nor any sense of public duty, nor public opinion—are, according to Tammany, the potential forces of municipal government. “Politics is war,” says the article; and so it is in the hands of savage and venal partisans.

Such is the admiration of our author-chief for crushing discipline, municipal savagery, and mere success, that he says: “We cannot fail to admire the success, . . . the resistless power of the Jacobin Club, . . . because it was skilfully organized.” The hordes of Tammany are partisan soldiers to obey leaders and earn their reward; not free citizens to discharge their duty.

Organization, and not education, success, and not improvement, victorious war, and not glorious peace, are presented as the supreme aims of Tammany. The regiment is the model for the Tammany primary, and the “six hundred charging down the valley of death” are cited as an inspiring example for city politicians. The ideal duties and relations of fellow citizens in city affairs are not those of peacefully considering them according to their nature as so much business to be done—the making and care of streets, buildings, and parks—or as so much discretion and trained skill to be exercised concerning schools, police, grog-shops, and public health,—with all of which quarrelsome partisan factions can have no relations but those of pernicious intermeddling,—but all these duties and relations are those of remorseless conflict, of partisan politics, and hence of endless war between hostile factions and camps. A more uncivilized, diabolic, and detestable theory of municipal government—one more destructive of municipal prosperity and morality—was never sketched.

As we read this sketch and imagine the great Indian chief, Tammany, with his paint and his feathers, leading his tribe to battle, we can see tomahawks gleaming between the lines and hear the war-whoop in the distance. It defends a despotism the king of Dahomey might envy, and a perpetual warfare over

which the Yahoos and Sioux would whoop and dance for joy. It would be unjust to say that there is nothing but the didactic presentation of this theory of eternal and insatiable war. There is a variety as great as in the hues of a zebra or in the contents of a Bologna sausage. That bumptious and audacious, yet specious and soporific, oratory of which Tammany has a fountain, everywhere lubricates the merciless logic of the war code.

The spoils system is defended in its most despotic, repulsive, and vicious form. "All the employees of the city government," says our chief, "from the mayor to the porter who makes his fire, should be members of the Tammany organization." Hence, every poor laborer appealing for employment, and every youth seeking a clerkship, under the city, is without hope if he has not sworn fealty to Tammany and, we may add, paid bribe money to its treasury or its leaders.

If a young woman would be a public-school teacher, or a poor widow be a matron in a city hospital, she must accept Tammany's war theories and wield little tomahawks in its defence. Office, according to Tammany, is not a trust, but a commodity. Are we really living in a civilized age and under a free government?

Tammany is no party, and refuses allegiance to any. It has no principles or platform to pledge it to duty. It fights only for itself. It is most like the mercenary and partisan war clubs of Florence which led to a despot. Its governmental theory is simple. It counts absolutely on the ignorant, the venal, and the depraved voters, holding them with the adhesive and relentless grasp of an octopus. It never alienates the grog-shop keepers, the gamblers, the beer-dealers, the nuisance-makers, or the proletariat. Patriotism and a sense of duty count for nothing in its estimate of political forces. Party passion, selfishness, and hopes of victory and spoils are its supreme reliance. Its basis is as enduring as the selfishness and depravity of human nature. Thus, sure of a vast mass of voters, Tammany will go as far towards well-doing as it may without alienating that mass. Its chiefs and mercenaries are forever laboring to bring out this vote. I once battled a whole night with two Tammany officials to secure a fair count in a model Tammany district,—of ignorance and vice,—with the result of more than 700 votes for Tammany to less than 20 opposed. What a blessing

inestimable it would be if Tammany would allow such voters to stay at home and forget the elections, as most of them would but for its bribery and coercion. Half the occupation of its chiefs and henchmen, if that liberty were allowed, would be gone.

What does history give us as the outcome from such a Tammany? Swartwout the collector, Price the district attorney, Fowler the postmaster, who together defrauded the nation of more than a million, were Tammanyites. The authors, in the days of Tweed, of the stupendous City Hall frauds, and the partisan rowdies and judges who foisted thousands as illegal voters upon the voting lists, were to a man Tammanyites. Tweed was a Tammany sachem; Connolly, who robbed the city treasury, Barnard, and the notorious judges who aided the work of corruption twenty years ago—these men—whose infamies filled two continents with the disgrace of the republic—were all Tammanyites.

If, of late, sterner laws and a more formidable press and public opinion have prevented offences so flagitious, yet the worst that has been done is the work of Tammany. It has caused the Civil-Service Law to be more feebly enforced in New York than in Boston or Washington. The aldermen who took bribes for a Broadway railroad charter were all Tammanyites. It has prevented New York from having a ballot reform nearly as effective as that of other States. Combining with the grog-shop keepers, Tammany has prevented excise reform in New York; and bills it has now pending at Albany threaten the most salutary restrictions, and may open Sundays and midnights to grog-shop debauchery. The fear of Tammany methods and of those who imitate them drove the World's Fair to Chicago. Tammany defeated that able and patriotic mayor, Hewitt, who stood for the commerce, the philosophy, the education, and the statesmanship of New York, and put in his place one unknown to any of these great interests. The degradation of the police courts has followed, unworthy men, utterly ignorant of the law, gaining seats there even more readily than under King John and the feudal lords of the thirteenth century; for his Magna Charta says: "We will not make any justices but of such as know the law and mean duly to observe it." Even worse than this; for Tammany now compels her candidates for judges, as well as other candidates for office, to, practically, pay in advance for their nomination, thus accumulating a vast fund by which leaders can be paid and voters

bribed. Such is an independent Tammany judiciary ! Such are our impartial judges ! One shrinks from putting truths like these in print. It is to our shame that we tolerate such degradation, the account of which reads like extracts from the infamous histories of Charles I. and James II. Such is the Tammany of to-day. Is it any wonder that it has plenty of money for carrying elections, or that its chief thinks all attempts at defence or apology would be dangerous ?

DORMAN B. EATON.